promising up-and-comer asks to cut back to three days per week for four months so he can study for his CPA. A highly trained, high-performing individual in a key role wants to job-share so she can spend more time with her toddlers. A successful sales manager asks for a 60% workload with no traveling so he can help care for his child with special needs.

Say no, and you risk losing key talent. But if you say yes, won’t you put productivity and efficiency at risk?

No, not if you’re careful, according to our study of 88 managers and executives in 20 companies across six business sectors in the United States and Canada.

Our in-depth research at major companies such as Merck, Unilever, Bank of Montreal, Starbucks, and Baxter International revealed that allowing employees to craft nontraditional workloads and schedules yields significant payoffs: Better retention of high performers. Greater productivity and efficiency. Improved team functioning. Deeper cross-training and development within the group.

But not all customized arrangements will deliver value to your organization. To increase the likelihood that a particular reduced-workload arrangement will benefit your unit and your company as a whole, work with the employee making the request to answer the following four questions.

1. CAN THE INDIVIDUAL PERFORM THIS JOB WELL ON A FLEXIBLE SCHEDULE?

You know your employee: Has he demonstrated the drive, adaptability, and commitment that suggest he will be able to perform effectively on a reduced-load schedule?

If you believe he can, then look closely with him at the job itself. Some positions do not accommodate flexible schedules well. Tight deadlines, the challenges of managing inexperienced subordinates, and a go-it-alone culture can stymie the best efforts of even your most talented and committed employees.

In our research, we talked with a vice president at a multinational financial institution who had agreed to let one of his direct reports cut back to an 80% workload. In charge of relationships with client banks in four countries in Southeast Asia, she had excellent language capabilities and a strong track record of generating new business. Replacing her would have been difficult, and forging the same strong client ties would have taken any replacement months, if not years. The VP naturally wanted to accommodate her request.

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Flexible Schedules continued

But her role required that she travel regularly to seek new business. By definition, the reduced-workload position cut back her efforts in this area by 20%, and the new-business revenue she generated showed a corresponding drop. In hindsight, her boss acknowledged that his decision weakened his organization's ability to grow and defend its market. Instead, he said, he should have worked with her to redefine her job responsibilities.

2. CAN THE DUTIES OF THIS JOB BE SHARED?

The most typical job share our research uncovered was a 60%-60% arrangement, in which each person is paid 60% of the base salary and works three days per week, with both parties in the office at the same time at least one day per week. This overlap helps ensure that each party can get fully briefed about conversations, projects, and decisions that the other has recently contributed to.

What's the most important factor for a job share to be successful? Excellent communication and collaboration between the two individuals who jointly hold the position. When this happens, job sharing can be enormously beneficial to the organization in that the skills and experiences of two people rather than just one drive performance.

A director of customer financing at a large manufacturer managed 18 business managers distributed throughout the country whose role was to provide salespeople with pricing and negotiation support. When a business manager position opened up, two people—one with a sales background, the other with finance expertise—applied for the position as a team. They proposed a 60%-60% arrangement, with each working three days per week.

Despite some skepticism about whether the arrangement would work and some mild grumbling about paying 120% of the salary, the director hired them. Their complementary backgrounds proved a great resource to the salespeople they supported. From the organization's perspective, the impact their performance had on sales revenue more than compensated for the 20% salary premium.

We saw a similar situation involving a regional sales manager job at a major pharmaceutical concern. Although each person brought particular strengths to the table, they backed each other up so thoroughly

HOW TO DO A QUICK COST/BENEFIT ANALYSIS

When weighing a request from an employee for a reduced-workload arrangement, ask yourself:

- Does this individual have a track record of above-average performance? Can I be confident that a reduced workload would not lessen his drive and commitment?
- What would be the long-term impact on his motivation, productivity, and tenure if I deny the request?
- If he left, what key projects or critical client relationships would be compromised?
- What would it cost to recruit and train a replacement?
that their colleagues felt equally comfortable taking questions and problems to one as to the other. And the strength of their combined performance was undeniable: in just one year, sales in their region moved from last out of 42 to No. 1.

One bank VP, commenting on a 60%-60% job share between two people he managed, spoke for many managers and executives in listing the benefits the arrangement delivered to him and the company: “With the range of skills these individuals bring to the table, I find that no issue they have to deal with is beyond their capabilities. Between them, they possess a huge knowledge base. And because they bounce ideas off each other and work them through, they generate more thoroughly reasoned decisions.”

So what are the downsides? A 60%-60% job share is more expensive than one person working at 100% of the salary. But many managers and executives we talked to commented that the value a team of two highly talented individuals brings to a single job is well worth the salary premium. Another concern is that a crisis in one person’s life—an illness, for example—can increase the other’s workload and require her to pay additional child care, spend more time away from the family, and so on. A final point to keep in mind is that, over time, the job share may no longer suit one party as well as it does the other. So review the arrangement once a year, and be prepared to alter or even terminate the arrangement.

3. CAN SOME OF THE POSITION’S DUTIES BE ELIMINATED?

Many jobs include a handful of “legacy” duties—tasks that at one time were important but are considerably less so now. If the employee asking you for a reduced-load position hasn’t already looked to eliminate low-value tasks, suggest she do so.

A VP in the hospitality industry was asked by one of his directors for a reduced workload. At his suggestion, she put together a proposal that outlined the pieces of her current job she judged could be eliminated. Although not every task she recommended for elimination was cut in the end, she and her boss were able to pare her job down to 80% by eliminating some tasks and reassigning others.

Deciding what to cut was difficult, her boss told us. “You need to decide what has to get done, what is nice to get done, and what can just be dropped.”

4. HOW CAN THE ARRANGEMENT STRENGTHEN THE ENTIRE UNIT?

Many managers and executives told us they realized unexpected benefits from allowing some of their direct reports to work reduced loads, such as greater collaboration in their units, enhanced talent development of team members, and reduced costs.

Increased collaboration and better cross-training were the result of a crisis that hit a small group of economists working for a large multinational bank. In just one year, two of its senior economists—one a man, one a woman—required reduced workloads so that they could care for their infants, both of whom were born with serious health problems.

Under the direction of the chief economist, the team listed all the work done by the group—the global monitoring they performed, every report they generated, each meeting one or more of its members attended—to see what could be eliminated. Then they took a fresh look at allocating the remaining work. They reassigned some work previously done by senior economists to research assistants. This then freed up the senior economists working a full load to take over some of their peers’ work. As a result of this exercise, the group became more cohesive and more deliberate in ensuring that adequate backup was in place when someone needed to be away.

The chief economist spoke for many managers and executives we talked with in emphasizing the

AVOID A COMMON PITFALL

While the lion’s share of reduced-workload arrangements delivers real value to the employee, the manager, and the unit as a whole, one common pitfall compromises success: a mismatch between the reduced-load schedule and the actual size of the job. This occurs when, for example, the manager agrees to let an individual work an 80% workload, but the job is reduced just 5%. The inevitable result is resentment and burnout on the employee’s part, and disappointment on the manager’s. In some cases, the overloaded employee ultimately resigns. It’s understandable that you as a manager want to get the most out of your high performers, but in this case moderating your expectations will serve you much better in the long run.
Are You Using Recognition Effectively?

by Christina Bielaszka-DuVernay

Recognition gets paid great lip service. Ask three managers if they consider it important to recognize the value their teams deliver, and chances are very good that you’ll get three positive responses.

But probe a little bit, and you’ll discover that the walk is leagues away from the talk.

Manager 1 makes recognition a priority—when he has time to think about it. For Manager 2, recognizing her team means having sandwiches brought in once or twice a quarter for a conference room lunch. Manager 3 is fairly consistent in doling out praise and rewards—too consistent, in fact. The boilerplate language in his thank-you notes and the inevitable $25 gift certificate to a “family-style” chain restaurant have become an in-joke among his team members, generating eye rolls more than anything else.

For recognition to strengthen your team’s performance, say Adrian Gostick and Chester Elton, authors of *The Carrot Principle: How the Best Managers Use Recognition to Engage Their People, Retain Talent, and Accelerate Performance* (Free Press, 2007), it can’t be haphazard, it can’t be generalized to the group, and it can’t be generic. So what characterizes recognition that actually works?

1. **EFFECTIVE RECOGNITION IS FREQUENTLY DELIVERED**

Once or twice a quarter won’t cut it, as Manager 2 has not yet realized. Research conducted in 1999 by The Gallup Organization (Washington, D.C.) found that employees’ engagement and motivation are strongly affected by how often they receive recognition for their work.

Three years after the U.S. branch of accounting firm KPMG introduced its recognition program, Encore, the number of employees who agreed with the statement “Taking everything into account, this is a great place to work” rose 20%. In analyzing the program’s effectiveness unit by unit, KPMG’s U.S. director of compensation discovered that units offering their employees less frequent recognition suffered notably higher turnover than units in which recognition was a frequent occurrence.

So how frequently should you let your team members know you recognize and appreciate their efforts? At least once every other week. We’re not talking gold watches here, point out Gostick and Elton. “Managers who earn the most trust and dedication from their people do so with many simple but powerful actions,” they write in *The Carrot Principle*. These can include sending them a sincere thank-you note, copying them on a memo praising their performance, or taking a moment in the weekly staff meeting to highlight their actions. To keep yourself on track, Gostick and Elton recommend maintaining a simple...